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524 PM URGENT 4-21-68 REM

TO DIRECTOR

FROM JACKSON (157-NEW)

UNSUBS; BURNING OF STARNES HEADSTART CENTER, BRANDYWINE, CLAIBORNE COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI, APRIL TWENTY ONE SIXTY-EIGHT. RM.

DAN MC CAY, SHERIFF, CLAIBORNE COUNTY, PORT GIBSON, MISS., ADVISED THIS DATE THAT THE STARNES HEADSTART SCHOOL LOCATED IN THE COMMUNITY OF BRANDYWINE, MISS., WAS COMPLETELY DESTROYED BY FIRE AT APPROXIMATELY TWO A.M. APRIL TWENTY ONE INSTANT. ADJACENT BARN CONTAINING THREE HUNDRED BALES OF HAY ALSO DESTROYED. BOTH BUILDINGS WERE PROPERTY OF W. D. STARNES, W/M, PORT GIBSON, MISS. BUILDINGS WERE UNOCCUPIED AT TIME OF FIRE AND NO INJURIES OCCURRED. FIRE INITIALLY REPORTED TO OWNER BY BEN SHANNON, W/M, BRANDYWINE, MISS. BRANDYWINE IS AN ISOLATED COMMUNITY LOCATED APPROXIMATELY TWENTY FIVE MILES EAST OF PORT GIBSON AND HAS NO FIRE FIGHTING EQUIPMENT. SHERIFF MC CAY ADVISED THERE HAD BEEN NO RACIAL PROBLEMS IN CONNECTION WITH THE SCHOOL IN THE PAST. MC CAY INSTITUTED INVESTIGATION TO DETERMINE IF ARSON.

CALVIN WILLIAMS, N/M, FIELD ASSISTANT, MISS. ACTION FOR PROGRESS (MAP), PORT GIBSON, MISS., ADVISED BRANDYWINE SCHOOL WAS ONE OF FIVE HEADSTART SCHOOLS IN CLAIBORNE COUNTY. SCHOOLS OPERATED BY (MAP)

END PAGE ONE

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PAGE TWO

WHICH IS FUNDED BY OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY (OEO). BUILDING WAS LEASED FROM W. D. STARNES. THIRTY EIGHT NEGRO CHILDREN WERE ENROLLED AT THE SCHOOL; HOWEVER, WILLIAMS ADVISED SCHOOL WAS OPEN TO BOTH WHITE AND NEGRO CHILDREN. HE ADVISED THERE HAD BEEN NO PREVIOUS RACIAL INCIDENTS IN CONNECTION WITH THE SCHOOL.

APPROPRIATE LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL AGENCIES HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED. SHERIFF MC CAY AND STATE AUTHORITIES CURRENTLY CONDUCTING AN INVESTIGATION OF THE FIRE. JACKSON FOLLOWING INVESTIGATION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND CONTACTING KLAN AND HATE GROUP SOURCES.

LHM FOLLOWS.

END

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Jackson, Mississippi

April 23, 1968

In Reply, Please Refer to
File No.

UNKNOWN SUBJECTS; BURNING OF
STARNES HEAD START SCHOOL,
BRANDYWINE, CLAIBORNE COUNTY,
MISSISSIPPI, APRIL 21, 1968

On April 21, 1968, Dan McCay, Sheriff, Claiborne County, Port Gibson, Mississippi, advised that at approximately 2:00 a.m. on April 21, 1968, the Starnes Head Start School, located in the community of Brandywine, Mississippi, was completely destroyed by fire. In addition, an adjacent barn containing approximately 300 bales of hay was also consumed by the fire. Sheriff McCay stated that Brandywine is an isolated community located approximately 25 miles east of Port Gibson, Mississippi, and has no fire fighting equipment. Both of the buildings destroyed were the property of W. D. Starnes, a white male, who resides at Port Gibson. Sheriff McCay further advised that at the time of the fire, both buildings were unoccupied and there were no injuries or deaths as a result of the fire.

Sheriff McCay continued that the occurrence of the fire had initially been reported to him by Calvin Williams, Negro male, Field Assistant, Mississippi Action for Progress (MAP), Port Gibson, Mississippi, at about 1:00 p.m. on April 21, 1968. At that time, Sheriff McCay had notified the appropriate state and Federal agencies. He had learned that the fire had been discovered in its initial stages by Ben Shannon, a white male, residing in the vicinity of Brandywine, and Shannon reported to W. D. Starnes at this time. Sheriff McCay remarked that the only official report Mr. Starnes had made had been to his insurance company.

157-9692-2

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11 - Bureau
1 - USA, Jackson
2 - MIGP, Jackson
② - Jackson (157-9692)
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D E Z A R N B R D

UNKNOWN SUBJECTS; BURNING OF
STARNES HEAD START SCHOOL

Sheriff McCay continued that there has been no racial problems to his knowledge in connection with the school in the past.

On April 21, 1968, Calvin Williams, Negro male, Field Assistant, MAP, Port Gibson, Mississippi, advised that the Head Start Center at Brandywine, Mississippi, was one of five such centers in Claiborne County, Mississippi. The schools are operated by the MAP, which in turn, was funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). Mr. Williams stated that the building used for the school at Brandywine had been leased from W. D. Starnes. Mr. Williams further advised that Mrs. Johnnie M. Owens, Brandywine, had been the Associate Services Aide in charge of the operation of the center at Brandywine.

Mr. Williams added that although the school was open to both white and Negro children, the school had been attended only by Negro children, 38 of which had been enrolled. He advised he knew of no past incidents or problems which had arisen in connection with the operation of the school at Brandywine.

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F B I

Date: 4/23/68

Transmit the following in _____
(Type in plaintext or code)Via AIRTEL AIRMAIL
(Priority)TO: DIRECTOR, FBI
FROM: SAC, JACKSON (157-9692)UNSUBS; BURNING OF STARNES
HEAD START SCHOOL, BRANDYWINE,
CLAIBORNE COUNTY, MISS.,
4/21/68

RM

Enclosed for the Bureau are 11 copies of an LHM concerning the fire which destroyed the Starnes Head Start School at Brandywine, Mississippi.

One copy of the LHM has been furnished to the USA, Jackson. Two copies furnished MIGp, Jackson.

LEAD:JACKSON

AT PORT GIBSON, MISSISSIPPI. Will follow investigation of local authorities into circumstances of fire and advise of any pertinent developments.

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(5) *✓**DEAR* *BRD*Approved: _____ Sent: _____ M Per: _____
Special Agent in Charge



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Jackson, Mississippi 39205

May 9, 1968

In Reply, Please Refer to
File No.

UNKNOWN SUBJECTS; BURNING OF
STARNES HEADSTART SCHOOL,
BRANDYWINE, CLAIBORNE COUNTY,
MISSISSIPPI, APRIL 21, 1968

Mr. Roscoe Johnson, Negro male and Chairman of the Claiborne County Advisory Board of the Mississippi Action for Progress (MAP) Program, advised on May 6, 1968, in regard to the fire which destroyed the Starnes Headstart Center, Brandywine, Mississippi, on April 21, 1968, that the school had been in operation about seven or eight months and had 38 pupils and seven employees. One additional employee was dismissed about two months ago, because it was necessary to reduce the number of paid personnel at the center. The Advisory Board determined, on the basis of guide lines established by higher authority, the person who would have to be dismissed. A young male Negro teacher was dropped from the rolls, as he had less need for financial assistance than did the other employees at the center. Mr. Johnson has heard, and he believes, that the fire at the Brandywine center was deliberately started but he does not believe the dismissed teacher was in any way responsible or involved in starting the fire.

Mr. Johnson stated that he knows of no threats to the teachers at the Brandywine center, nor does he know of any other trouble or incidents there. He has heard nothing to indicate there has been Ku Klux Klan activity in the vicinity. He did note that when the Headstart Center Program was first initiated in Claiborne County, those responsible experienced a great deal of difficulty in finding a building

- 11 - Bureau (RM)
- 1 - USA, Jackson (RM)
- 2 - MIGp, Jackson (RM)
- 1 - Jackson (157-9692)

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UNKNOWN SUBJECTS; BURNING OF
STARNES HEADSTART SCHOOL

that could be rented, and when they did obtain the building, they experienced problems in overcoming zoning and health department restrictions. After one or two centers had been established, other individuals became more cooperative, and the program now experiences little opposition. The Starnes Center was opened and has operated without difficulty or opposition from the white community. Some friction was initially present among members of the Negro race, as the Negroes of the Brandywine area believed they were adequately represented on the staff of the school, however, these difficulties have been resolved.

Mr. Johnson advised the Advisory Board has considered consolidating the five centers located in Claiborne County, into one building, which would be located in a now vacant school building in Pattison, Mississippi, a change which is not definite and which has been proposed to make more efficient and effective use of the funds available in the county. He has heard rumors that the fire at the Brandywine center was started in an attempt to assure and hasten this proposed change. He has no concrete information to substantiate this.

Mr. Johnson has also heard that the fire was indirectly the result of "selective buying" or boycotting certain stores in Port Gibson, Mississippi, by Negroes of Claiborne County. Very little of the money which has entered the county to support the Headstart Center is being spent at the stores in Port Gibson, which are owned and operated by white individuals. And, the fire may possibly have been caused by one or more of the white merchants attempting to interfere with the Headstart Center Program, although Mr. Johnson pointed out that Brandywine is in the extreme southeastern corner of the county and individuals from this area could and do shop in communities other than Port Gibson, so this rumor is not a realistic evaluation of the situation. Then too, many Negroes in the community

UNKNOWN SUBJECTS; BURNING OF
STARNES HEADSTART SCHOOL

are surreptitiously trading with the boycotted stores, in that they call in their order and it is delivered or picked up after dark.

Mr. Johnson knows of no witnesses or potential witnesses in regard to this incident.

Deputy Sheriff Dan McCay, Claiborne County Sheriff's Office, advised on May 6, 1968, that investigation by his office led him to believe that the fire at the Starnes Headstart Center, at Brandywine, Mississippi, had been deliberately set. He was assisted during the investigation by Mississippi State Fire Marshal Berry, and by Investigator Underwood of the Mississippi Highway Safety Patrol (MHSP). He believed that arson was involved because the investigators found that hay had been placed on the front porch of the burned building, and the small wagon which was reportedly left in the front yard was found inside the ruins. A barn, containing three hundred bales of hay, also burned and was located 94 yards from the Headstart Center building. Prevailing winds were not blowing in the direction of the barn on the night of the fire.

Deputy Sheriff McCay was unable to determine a reason for the center having been destroyed, as there had been no incidents of violence or threatened violence reported in connection with the operation of the center. The county does have a few white "rednecks," but these people do not seem to be as emotionally concerned with the Headstart Program as with some other forms of civil rights activity in the county. Deputy Sheriff McCay stated that he had been advised that Calvin Williams, Field Assistant, MAP, had fired some of the Negro teachers and school bus drivers who had been employed by the Headstart Program and that Williams had later been advised that he did not have

UNKNOWN SUBJECTS; BURNING OF
STARNES HEADSTART SCHOOL

the authority for this action, so the employees had been rehired. Williams was thereafter allegedly dismissed from his position, because of his actions, but he too was reinstated as the person or persons who had dismissed were likewise acting without proper authority. Friction does exist those participating in the Headstart Program, but Deputy Sheriff McCay has developed no information which would indicate the existing animosities were responsible for the fire.

Deputy Sheriff McCay stated the buildings were a complete loss to Mr. W. D. Starnes, a white male, who owns the buildings, but that Mr. Starnes was insured, Deputy Sheriff McCay believes, for \$5,000. As the rent Mr. Starnes was receiving is believed to be substantial and as the building was unoccupied prior to its use as a Headstart Center, Mr. Starnes is not a logical suspect according to Deputy Sheriff McCay.

No physical evidence was located which would assist in the identifying of the unknown subjects responsible for the fire. In view of the isolated area, no witnesses were found who could furnish information of value concerning this matter.

The following article appeared in the Thursday, April 25, 1968, issue of The Port Gibson Reveille Newspaper:

UNKNOWN SUBJECTS;
BURNING OF STARNES
HEADSTART SCHOOL

Head Start Center In East Claiborne Burned Sunday

The house on the farm of W. D. Starnes in the Brandywine community in eastern Claiborne County, was destroyed by fire about one o'clock Sunday morning. The house has been used as a Head Start Center in that area for several months.

In addition, a barn with hay and implements in it, many yards from the house was also destroyed, and two sheds. A tractor was saved by the fact that Mr. Starnes had been using it in his yard in Port Gibson.

An investigation by officers is being made as to the origin of the fire.

Walter D. Smith, Director of Information, Mississippi Action for Progress, Inc., with headquarters in Jackson, issued a news release Monday, in which he stated:

"Owen Cooper, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Mississippi Action for Progress, Inc. (MAP), said that the persons responsible for the recent burning of the Starnes Head Start Center in Claiborne County no doubt do not understand the full extent to which this program is lending sustenance to the people of Claiborne County. The Board pointed out the program is basically seeking to provide 216 pre-school children with essential health, education and nutritional benefits which can be the means of lifting the general standard of health and education throughout the county. Last year MAP spent the sum of \$216,587.00 in Claiborne County. The Board further stated that those responsible for the burning fail to recognize that anything which expands the potential for good of people in the lower income brackets in the end helps everyone within the county..."

"Good citizens of Claiborne County, the Board said, unquestionably join in condemning acts of arson and other acts of lawless violence."

UNKNOWN SUBJECTS; BURNING OF
STARNE'S HEADSTART SCHOOL

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F B I

Date: 5/9/68

Transmit the following in _____

(Type in plaintext or code)

Via AIRTELAIRMAIL

(Priority)

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI

FROM: SAC, JACKSON (157-9692) (C)

SUBJECT: UNSUBS; BURNING OF STARNES
HEADSTART SCHOOL, BRANDYWINE,
CLAIBORNE COUNTY, MISS.,
4/21/68
RM

Re Jackson airtel to the Bureau, dated 4/23/68.

Enclosed herewith are 11 copies of an LHM. One copy of the LHM is being furnished the USA, Jackson, and two copies are being furnished MIGp, Jackson.

No additional investigation is being conducted.

UACB.

3 - Bureau (Enc. 11) (RM)

① - Jackson

JGW:bal

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Special Agent in Charge